

**Quality Case Work and Worker Demographics**

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### Abstract

Quality case work provision has long been the goal of all human services delivery systems. The primary purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the demographics of workers that were involved in providing quality service provision as evaluated by the Council on Accreditation (COA). Utilizing data collected from Kentucky's Cabinet for Health and Human Services COA site review in the Green River Service Region and worker demographics from the same region under review, this study examined relationships between those cases chosen by COA as examples of quality case work and the workers that provided case management services in these cases. Study findings revealed that length of tenure with the Cabinet played an important role in case selection. Future studies should assess more comprehensively the impact of this factor upon quality service provision.

## Quality Case Work and Worker Demographics

### Introduction

#### *Problem Statement*

The provision of quality service provision to society's most vulnerable populations has been a long standing goal of many human services organizations throughout the United States (Price, 2005). While there has been considerable literature indicating what service provision should entail, there appears to be a wide range of opinions as to who should be carrying out these services (Child Welfare League of America, 2002; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1994; National Association of Social Workers, 1981). The purpose of this study was to examine various worker demographics as they pertain to quality service provision.

After reviewing the literature, it becomes apparent that there is some disagreement over the term "worker" as it pertains to provision of social services to the population at risk. Depending upon the source, which can vary from state to state and agency to agency, the definition of "worker", can range from an individual with a degree in social work to an individual with no social work education at the entry level (Child Welfare League, 2002; Pasztor, Saint-Germain & DeCrescenzo, 2002; National Association of Social Workers, 1981). It appears that the difference between these two definitions and the use of these definitions maybe based along political and financial lines (U. S. General Accounting Office, 2003). The literature points to this difference perhaps as a result of disagreement between private bodies engaged in reviewing service provisions and setting standards for such service provision and those engaged in funding and hiring these workers. As an example, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) both view "workers" as those individuals that have obtained a social work education at either the bachelor or master level (National Association of Social Workers, 1981; Child Welfare League of America, 2002). The Council on Accreditation (COA) also draws a distinction between those that hold social work degrees and those who do not, especially where it pertains to the number of cases that can be carried by a worker as well as the number of workers that a supervisor can supervise, based upon the degree

held by the supervisor ( U.S. General Accounting Office, 2003). The U.S. Department of Labor however, lists various related degrees in their description of a “social worker” (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006). This is in line with the various requirements determined by state social service agencies (Child Welfare League of America, 2002; Harness, L. & Mulinski, P., 1988; Lieberman, A., Hornby, H., & Russell, M., 1988). What is not in question is the need to educate and fund education, especially in the child services arena (Pierce, 2003; U.S. General Accounting Office, 2003.).

This project seeks to explore case manager demographics as they pertain to quality case work in hopes of identifying those demographics that may have a bearing on case work quality. The use of the word “quality” will be based upon those criteria as set forth by the Council on Accreditation (COA). COA is presently the only accrediting body offering standards for public child welfare systems (Stoparic, 2005).

#### Method

This research design is exploratory in nature as it examines secondary data collected during normal agency activity. The demographics of case managers for the Cabinet for Families and Children, Green River Service Region, Protection and Permanency Division and the possible role that these demographics play in quality case work as determined by the Council on Accreditation (COA) are the focus of this research. The data was collected from the Green River Service Region Site Review Report conducted by COA and from the Cabinet’s information system, TWIST.

The site review report provided the number of cases that were selected by COA as having acceptable case work, identified who the case manager was, if the case manager had multiple cases selected and the type of the case, i.e. child protection in-home, child protection out of home or adult protection. The TWIST informational system provided a listing of all case managers whom had cases eligible for selection for the COA site visit. From this listing, the following demographics were identified: race, gender, years of service with the agency, type of degree, and whether the case manager had a formal social work education (either a BSW degree or MSW

degree). The resulting combined data provided an operable data set that could then be broken out and various demographics examined.

All case manager specific demographics were removed so as to protect against case manager identification. Likewise all case specific information was deleted from the data set to protect any possibility of client identification. IRB approval was granted prior to the conducting of this research.

The resulting data set was then entered in to an SPSS file (Version 13.0). The resulting data was then examined and statistical analysis were conducted by first reviewing all cases selected and then breaking down the data to those case managers that had cases selected and those that did not. In order to understand the data collected; descriptive statistics, variability statistics and Pearson's r correlation test were computed as applicable and their results interpreted.

## Results

### *General Case/Worker Demographics*

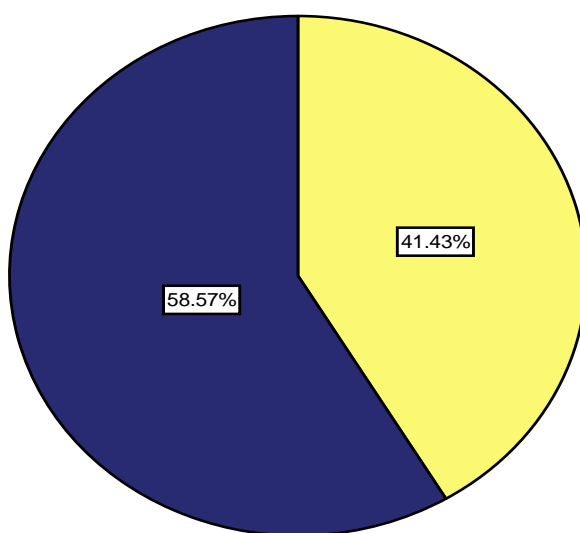
Data indicates that there were 70 case managers under contract with the Green River Service Region at the time of the COA site visit. All of these case managers would have had cases assigned to them at this time and therefore eligible for selection by COA. Out of these 70 case managers, the average length of service with the agency was 4.64 years of service with a standard deviation of 5.071. The range between these case managers was a minimum of 0 years of service and a maximum of 29 years of service.

Of these 70 case managers 84.3% were female (n=59) and 15.7% male (n=11). The race demographic indicated that 92.9% (n=65) of the case managers were listed as white, with 7.1% (n=5) listed as African American. No other races were indicated or verified. 61.4% (n=43) had obtained a social work education, either a BSW degree or a MSW degree, with 38.6% (n=27) having another type of degree. These other degrees included criminal justice, human services, psychology, sociology and other miscellaneous degrees not otherwise identified by the Cabinet's data base.

As it pertains to cases selected for COA review, 41.4% (n=29) of the 70 case managers had cases selected for COA with 58.6% (n=41) not having cases selected (See Graph 1). Out of the number of case managers that had cases selected for COA, (n=29) 16 had a social work education with 13 having some other type of degree. In comparison out of the 41 case managers that did not have a case selected for COA purposes, 27 had a social work degree and 14 did not.

**Graph 1**

**% Of Case Managers with Cases Selected**



While 58.6% of the case managers did not have a case selected for COA review, 22.9% (n=16) had at least one case selected, with 18.5% (n=13) having more than one case selected. 2 case managers had 6 cases selected for COA purpose. The mean number of cases selected was .81 with a standard deviation of 1.333. Pearson r, which was used for the purpose establishing correlations, indicates that a low positive significant correlation exist between years of service and the number of cases selected for COA at .333.

As it pertains to the case manager's work county data indicates that from the number of eligible case managers (n=70), 47.1% (n=33) were from Daviess County, 21.4% (n=15) were from Henderson County, 7.1% (n=5) from McLean County, 11.4% (n=8) from Ohio County,

2.9% (n=2) from Hancock County, 5.7% (n=4) from Union County and 4.35 (n=3) from Webster County.

*Case managers with Cases Selected*

Those case managers which had cases selected for COA (n=29) had an average of 5.62 years with the agency, with the standard deviation being 6.282 years. The range was between 0 years at the minimum and 29 years at the maximum, with 65.4% (n=19) having between 3 years and 7 years of service with the agency. The variance was 39.458. Likewise, out of these 29 case managers, 20.7% (n=6) had a BSW degree with 34.5% (n=10) having a MSW degree for a combined 55.2% having some form of social work degree (See Table 1). The remainder (n=13) had no social work degree. 79.3% (n=23) were female with 20.7% (n=6) being male. All 29 case managers were listed as white, as it pertains to race.

**Table 1**

**Type of Degree**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BA-Criminal Justice	1	3.4	3.4	3.4
	BA-Human Services	1	3.4	3.4	6.9
	BA-Other	4	13.8	13.8	20.7
	BSW	6	20.7	20.7	41.4
	BA-Psych	3	10.3	10.3	51.7
	BA-Soc	2	6.9	6.9	58.6
	MA-Education	1	3.4	3.4	62.1
	MS-Other	1	3.4	3.4	65.5
	MSW	10	34.5	34.5	100.0
	Total	29	100.0	100.0	

As it pertains to the number of case managers (n=29) who had cases selected from the various counties in the Green River Service Region, 41.4% (n=12) were from Daviess County, 17.2%

(n=5) from Henderson County, 10.3% (n=3) from McLean County, 20.7% (n=6) from Ohio County, 3.4% (n=1) from Union County and 6.9% (n=2) from Webster County (See Table 2).

**Table 2**

**County of Case Managers whom Cases Selected**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Daviess	12	41.4	41.4	41.4
	Henderson	5	17.2	17.2	58.6
	McLean	3	10.3	10.3	69.0
	Ohio	6	20.7	20.7	89.7
	Union	1	3.4	3.4	93.1
	Webster	2	6.9	6.9	100.0
	Total	29	100.0	100.0	

*Workers with Cases Not Selected*

Of those case managers with cases not selected for COA review (n=41), the average years of service with the agency was 3.95 years with a standard deviation of 3.943 years. The range of years was from 0 to 18 years with the maximum being 18 and the minimum being 0 years with 24.4% (n=10) having less than 1 year of experience. 65.9% of this group had less than four years of experience with the agency. The variance was 15.548. 65.8% (n=28) had a formal social work degree, with 51.2% (n=21) having a BSW degree with 14.6% (n=6) having a MSW degree. The remaining 34.2% had some other type of degree (See Table 3).

**Table 3**

**Type of Degree**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BA-Criminal Justice	2	4.9	4.9	4.9
	BA-Other	2	4.9	4.9	9.8
	BSW	21	51.2	51.2	61.0
	BA-Psych	7	17.1	17.1	78.0
	BA-Soc	3	7.3	7.3	85.4
	MSW	6	14.6	14.6	100.0
	Total	41	100.0	100.0	



Gender and race demographical data indicates that the majority of these case managers were female, 87.8% (n=36), with males being 12.2% (n=5) of the remainder. 87.8% (n=36) were White and 12.2% (n=5) African America respectfully.

Of the case managers (n=41) whom did not have cases selected for COA, 51.2% (n=21) were from Daviess County, 24.4% (n=10) from Henderson County, 4.9% (n=2) from McLean County, 4.9% (n=2) from Ohio County, 4.9% (n=2) from Hancock County, 7.3% (n=3) from Union County, and 2.4% (n=1) from Webster County (See Table 4).

**Table 4**

**County of workers that did not have cases selected**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Daviess	21	51.2	51.2	51.2
	Henderson	10	24.4	24.4	75.6
	McLean	2	4.9	4.9	80.5
	Ohio	2	4.9	4.9	85.4
	Hancock	2	4.9	4.9	90.2
	Union	3	7.3	7.3	97.6
	Webster	1	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	41	100.0	100.0	

### Discussion

The primary purpose of this exploratory study was to examine and review various demographics that could possibly play a part in the selection of cases for COA review. The study's findings indicate that with the demographics being examined; only the length of time with the agency had a significant bearing on whether a case manager's case was selected or not for COA as seen by the low positive significant correlation indicated by Pearson's  $r$  (.333). This can also be seen when one examines the average years of service across the two groups. As it pertains to those case managers with cases selected, 65.4% had between 3 to 7 years of experience with the agency as compared to 65.9% having less than 4 years of experience of those case managers that did not have cases selected.

It was believed that social work education would have had a major impact upon case selection, but the data gathered in this research indicated that it was less of a determinate than year of service with the agency. There is a possibility that this is a result of the ongoing and intense training that case managers receive during their employment as well as the overall majority of case managers having a degree in other human services related fields.

On the surface it appears that race as well as gender played a role in the selection process. However, in further review, it must be pointed out that due to the majority of case managers being predominately White and female, this could not be deemed as a factor in the selection process without increasing the sample size from which to draw from.

In reviewing the work county, as it pertains to whether a case manager had a case selected or not, it appears that the number of cases selected as well as the number of case managers selected fell generally within expectations, in that the case selection ran along the lines of the counties with the majority of cases as well as the number of possible case managers that could have been selected. One possible area to note would be that Hancock County had no cases selected for review. They do, however, have only two case managers with a limited number of cases to be selected from.

### Research Limitations

Various limitations are present within this research study and should be considered before additional inference is taken from the results.

First, the study is limited by the pure nature of the case selection process. At the time of case selection, only the last person to be carrying the case, the case manager, is listed. What this does not indicate are the various other individuals that may have played a role in the management of the case. Their contribution to the case work may have caused the case to fall out of compliance of COA standards and resulted in the case not being selected. This would be especially true in those work counties that have specialized duties where the case manager does not carry the case from intake to closure.

Secondly, due to COA requiring a predetermined number of cases to be reviewed due to the program that they impact, the possibility exist that specific cases may be carried by specific units. An example of this can be seen in the Daviess County office, which has an Adult Protection Unit, which is responsible for all of the adult protection cases. Similarly, the region has two Recruitment and Certification Units that only carry adoption cases. This could limit the selection process. Likewise the counties from which the cases were selected may have varying community resources available to them that would impact the potential quality services provided, therefore limiting the ability of the case manager, regardless of their demographics. It is important to note that other demographics, which were not examined, may play an important role in the selection process, such as work experience prior to employment with the agency, the number of cases being carried by a particular case manager at the time of the COA review, and the role of supervision.

Finally, the sample size of both the number of workers ( $n=70$ ) reviewed and the number of cases ( $n=50$ ) examined is small and not necessarily reflective of a larger population. This is especially true when examining the role of gender and race in the case selection process.

### Conclusion

As the need for and the effectiveness of quality service delivery is continuously under review, this study contributes to this body of literature by focusing on various demographics that may assist in determining what demographics may be influencing outcomes as it pertain to quality social services and case management. In the era of evidence based practice and fiscal restraint it is imperative that services are being provide by case managers that can meet acceptable standards of practice therefore calling for continuous review of practices that are utilized to meet the needs of the clients involved.

Perhaps the most significant impact of this study will be in causing additional questions to be asked and therefore demanding answers. If tenure with an agency plays a significant role in quality service provision, than how does the agency maintain this quality when case managers retired, exit or are promoted within this system. Future studies would do well to not only

examine this question but to also examine the long term effectiveness of these case management services. Similarly the impact of large case loads and the role of specialization within the social services provision should also be reviewed for their impact on quality case work.

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